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FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1363
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RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000501

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, NEA/PI, INR/NESA, R/MR, I/GNEA,
B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA
LONDON FOR NEA WATCHER
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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION - U.S. SOLDIERS ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED IN
ROAD RAGE INCIDENT

Summary

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

Summary and comment: Three Kuwaiti dailies, one English language and two Arabic language, published front page articles about an altercation that allegedly occurred between U.S. military personnel and Kuwaiti nationals. The incident allegedly took place on the evening of Monday, May 5 on Arabian Gulf Road, a major thoroughfare in downtown Kuwait City. As of 1100 Kuwaiti time on May 7, U.S. Army Central Command (ARCENT) has not publicly confirmed any details surrounding the alleged incident. All three stories report that the soldiers' operation of a U.S. military vehicle led to an altercation that resulted in U.S. military personnel firing shots into the air. This alleged altercation is unprecedented in memory and contrary to the long-standing history of excellent relations between U.S. military serving in Kuwait and the Kuwaiti government. It should be noted that although the English daily, Kuwait Times, did not report on the alleged incident, it published a pro-U.S. military editorial on page two. End Summary.

Block Quotes:

--The English daily, The Arab Times reporter (05/07): "A fight broke out between Kuwaitis and U.S. Army soldiers on Arabian Gulf Street Monday evening, when the driver of the bus belonging to the U.S. Army allegedly drove recklessly and almost caused several accidents. The incident led to a clash between the Americans and the Kuwaitis, causing a serious traffic jam on the street. A retired Kuwaiti army officer who happened to be in the vicinity intervened and tried to resolve the matter, but the American soldiers allegedly behaved highhandedly and said that no one could prevent them from doing what they want. They allegedly even said that there is no authority over them in this country and fired several warning shots in the air to disperse and terrify the crowd." The story goes on to add: "Eyewitness called on concerned authorities to act and stop the soldiers from mocking Kuwaitis."

--The newly established moderate Arabic language daily, Awan, mentioned the story as well. Awan reported the same story, but began the story with the allegations of the U.S. soldiers firing shots in the air. The story specifies (05/07): "U.S. soldiers fired warning shots in the air on Arabian Gulf Street the night before yesterday. Eyewitnesses added that many U.S. soldiers were in a U.S. Army vehicle and that they caused a traffic jam because of their operation of that vehicle." The article went on to opine that because of the U.S. soldiers' reckless operation of the vehicle, several accidents almost occurred, leading to the altercation.

--The pro-Kuwaiti government Arabic daily, Al-Seyassah, reported

(05/07): "For the first time in Kuwait, an altercation broke out between some Kuwaiti drivers and a number of U.S. military personnel on Arabian Gulf Street. The bus operated by the U.S. military personnel almost caused several accidents because of carelessness. Eyewitnesses also mentioned that the U.S. military personnel provoked the passengers. Eyewitnesses also urged authorities at the scene to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future."

--The English daily, Kuwait Times, published a pro-U.S. military editorial on page two. The article, by columnist Muna Al-Fuzai, argues that a strong U.S. military presence is needed in Kuwait, not only during the 1991 Gulf War, but also in the period after the fall of Iraqi Saddam Hussein and in the future. She writes, "The U.S. has given us a lot, most importantly its youth. Young American soldiers came to protect us and many died carrying out their mission. Many of which left their family and friends back home just so they can complete their mission in Kuwait. The U.S. made many sacrifices for us and gratitude is the least that we can offer them." She adds, "Kuwait is a small country located between two enemies, so Saddam is not the only nightmare that we can expect; there could be worse...the United States has given us a lot, and has even shed blood for us. It is our time to think about what is next, and not feel helpless about how to defend ourselves."

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